



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

May 12, 2004

Ms. Jennifer Barnett
Nichols, Jackson, Dillard, Hager & Smith, L.L.P.
1800 Lincoln Plaza
500 North Akard
Dallas, Texas 75201

OR2004-3892

Dear Ms. Barnett:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 201468.

The City of Allen (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for information related to an investigation and subsequent arrest of a named person for possession of a controlled substance. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.108 of the Government Code.

Initially, we must address the city's obligations under the Act. Pursuant to section 552.301(e), a governmental body is required to submit to this office within fifteen business days of receiving an open records request (1) general written comments stating the reasons why the stated exceptions apply that would allow the information to be withheld, (2) a copy of the written request for information, (3) a signed statement or sufficient evidence showing the date the governmental body received the written request, and (4) a copy of the specific information requested or representative samples, labeled to indicate which exceptions apply to which parts of the documents. You did not, however, submit to this office a copy of the written request for information, a signed statement or sufficient evidence of the date you received the request, or the specific information requested or a representative sample.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to submit to this office the information required in section 552.301(e) results in the legal presumption that the information is public and must be released. Information that is

presumed public must be released unless a governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information to overcome this presumption. *See Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381-82 (Tex. App.--Austin 1990, no writ) (governmental body must make compelling demonstration to overcome presumption of openness pursuant to statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.302); Open Records Decision No. 319 (1982). Normally, a compelling interest is that some other source of law makes the information confidential or that third party interests are at stake. *See* Open Records Decision No. 150 at 2 (1977). You assert that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.103 and 552.108. Section 552.103 is a discretionary exception that does not overcome the presumption of openness. *See* Open Records Decision No. 551 (1990) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.103 serves only to protect governmental body's position in litigation and does not itself make information confidential). Furthermore, you have not demonstrated a compelling reason under section 552.108 to overcome the presumption of openness. *See e.g.*, Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991) (need of another governmental body to withhold information may provide compelling reason for nondisclosure under Gov't Code § 552.108). Thus, the city has waived its claims under sections 552.103 and 552.108. Accordingly, we conclude that the city may not withhold the requested information under either section 552.103 or section 552.108 and must release the information to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free,

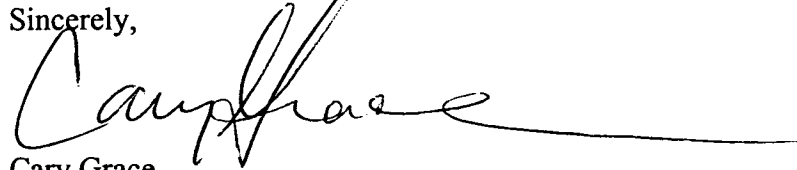
at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cary Grace', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cary Grace
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

ECG/krl

Ref: ID# 201468

c: Ms. Barbara Walker Sommers
406 E. Polk Street
Richardson, Texas 75081